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The Mecklenburg
Declaration of
Independence..

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The Mecklenburg
Declaration of Independence

Sept 18 1864

Beifüg man den Kopfbuchstaben
infolgend dem Revolutions-
auslaß zum Bezug
auf den Nachen

For Anna

his find 1779.

The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence
as Mentioned in Records of
Wachovia.

BY
MISS ADELAIDE L. FRIES.
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EDWARDS & BROUGHTON PRINTING COMPANY, RALEIGH, N. C.
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THE MECKLENBURG DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, AS MENTIONED IN RECORDS OF WACHOVIA.*

In September, 1904, Mr. O. J. Lehman, of Bethania, N. C., discovered among the papers in the Moravian Archives at that place an historical sketch bearing on its cover the title:

“Bruchstück,
Aufsatz von den Vorkommenheiten
während dem Revolutions-Kriege
welche einen Bezug
auf die Wachau
hatten
bis Ende 1779.”

In this paper Mr. Lehman found a pointed reference to the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, which he translated and sent to the *Charlotte Observer*. The paragraph and its translation are as follows: “Ich kan zu Ende des 1775^{sten} Jahres nicht unangemerkt lassen, dass schon im Sommer selbigen Jahres, das ist im May, Juny, oder July, die *County Mecklenburg* in Nord *Carolina* sich für so frey u. *independent* von England *declarirte*, u. solche Einrichtung zur Verwaltung der Gesetze unter sich machte, als jamalen der *Continental Congress* hernach ins Ganze gethan. Dieser *Congress* aber sahe dieses Verfahren als zu frühzeitig an.” The words in italics are written in English script, the others in German. “I can not leave unmentioned at the end of the 1775th year, that already in the summer of this year, that is in May, June or July, the *County of Mecklenburg* in North *Carolina* declared itself free and *independent* of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of the laws among themselves, as later the *Continental Congress* made for all. This *Congress*, however, considered these proceedings premature.”

* Reprinted from *The Wachovia Moravian* of April, 1906.

The publishing of this paragraph in 1904, and the printing of the fac-simile in December, 1905, accompanied by an article from the pen of Mr. Alexander Graham, has brought forth a number of letters inquiring as to the date and authorship of the "Fragment," which unfortunately lacks both date and signature. These questions may be condensed into five, which cover the whole ground:

(1) The authenticity of the Moravian Church Diaries is beyond question, but this paper, by its title, is not a part of the Diary, but only a "Fragment":—can it be considered reliable?

(2) Taken alone the paragraph reads like a kind of post-script and was certainly written after 1775, since it refers to later proceedings of Congress:—is it a part of the original document?

(3) Where was the paper written?

(4) Who wrote it?

(5) When was it written?

A considerable amount of time, care, and research have been necessary before these questions could be satisfactorily answered, but the following statements may now be made:

(1.) *Can it be considered reliable?* It was customary to keep the daily Church Diaries as concisely as possible, and any event which required more extended notice was written separately and filed with the Diaries. Memoirs, accounts of special Church services, historical sketches, etc., are classed together by Moravian Archivists under the technical name of "Beilage," the term employed by the earlier diarists, and this "Fragment" has its counterpart in a number of such papers written at different periods. Many of these "Beilage" are still between the pages of the Diaries,—others have been taken out from time to time for reference, and when so removed the ascertaining of date and authorship is difficult, as practically none are signed. This arouses no surprise in the mind of any one who has worked among the records, for it was not customary to sign anything, even the carefully kept minutes of the various Boards give the

bey unsers alten Herrn zu haben war, so frag ich die Herren gegen
 uns, ob wir nicht, n. ob wir nicht in unsern vorigen Briefen
 gar nicht, was man altat noch late mit uns zu thun, was wir wol nicht alle
 was wir nicht, mit uns, sonder man gutten Grund man sich zu
 glauben, was ich oft den Herrn zu versetzen, dem mit uns, Gnade
 Ich bin zu Ende des 1775, den 1. Juny, in der Stadt Laufen, daß
 von dem Herrn, alligen Jafat, daß am May, den 1. Juny, in der Stadt
 County Mecklenburg in Nord Carolina, sich für die Provinz independent von
 England declariren. solich Commission zur Verwaltung der Gassen
 unter sich, meist als gemein der Continental Congress, für uns
 ganz zu thun. Dieser Congress aber, sich nicht nur, sondern als zu
 beschreiben.

Facsimile of Reference to Mecklenburg Declaration.

name and signature of neither chairman nor secretary. Apparently, to their minds, the subject of which they wrote was all-important, their own connection with it entirely secondary, but their painstaking accuracy is so marked that the careful student gives them entire confidence even while regretting that their custom did not conform to modern usage.

(2.) *Is it a part of the original document?* The "Fragment" is neither a diary, nor a mechanical compilation from a diary. It is an historical sketch, well written, clear-cut, showing keen insight into the affairs of the State and Nation, as well as the most intimate acquaintance with events in Wachovia. While for convenience the author divides his account into years, he frequently runs forward to link some result to its cause. For example, in reciting some of the events early in 1775, he states that the sailors on the English merchant ships in Charleston harbor, being unable to secure permission to land their cargoes, simply threw them overboard, so that they could load with rice and sail for home. Salt was one of the articles so destroyed, and he comments on the great scarcity of this prime necessity later on, and the suffering that the saving of this salt might have averted. Paper money claims his attention in each year's history, but in speaking of the first issue without royal authority, in 1775, he notes its utter loss of value late in the war; and again, in 1777, he mentions the statement by the Assembly of 1783 that the depreciation began in '77. The introduction of later developments into the Mecklenburg paragraph is, therefore, quite in keeping with the rest of the paper; and its form is also paralleled by similar additions at the close of other years, where items which had been omitted in the current account were added at the close. This paragraph is plainly a part of the original document, and entitled to all the credence that may be given to any part thereof.

(3.) *Where was it written?* Although found in Bethania, this paper was most certainly written by a man who lived in Salem during the Revolutionary War. Not only does the whole story

center about Salem, then already the principal town of Wachovia, but events transpiring there are given with a certain intimate knowledge that can have no other explanation. The paper must have been taken to Bethania at some later date, perhaps in comparatively recent years.

(4.) *Who wrote it?* The handwriting of the "Fragment" differs from that found in the Church Diaries of those years, and certain features in the paper itself suggested Traugott Bagge as its author. This was confirmed beyond a question by finding in the Land Office in Salem several Annual Statements of the Store, written, dated and signed by Traugott Bagge. The script, though small, is unusually firm and distinct, and it is possible to compare two specimens letter by letter. When this test is applied to the "Fragment," with these Annual Statements as the standard, the handwriting of the "Fragment" is found to be Bagge's throughout. Moreover, in the body of the "Fragment" there is given a list of the men who signed a certain paper explaining the position of the Moravians in regard to the war, and their neutrality, and in this list appears the name of Traugott Bagge. Laid by the side of the signed Statements already alluded to, it becomes evident that this name is a genuine signature, and by the fortunate insertion of this list the signature of the author is contained in the body of the paper, although it does not appear at the end.

This not only proves the author but guarantees the accuracy of statements in the "Fragment," for Bagge was the most able man of affairs in Wachovia during the War. At that time the Store was the center of trade for all the country round, and under Bagge's skillful management the necessities of life were never entirely lacking for those who depended on his Store to supply them. His influence saved the town from financial ruin in the flood of paper currency which swept over the land; and as he went to Charleston for supplies, to Hillsboro or Newbern to appear before the Assembly, or to Old Richmond to the County Courts, he was ever on the alert to watch the trend of

events, and it was doubtless from the information he gained, and with the aid of his shrewd judgment that the ministers charged with control of affairs in Wachovia were able to lead their brethren safely through the very great perplexities and dangers that surrounded them. As merchant, financier, politician, as a sturdy, conscientious man, Traugott Bagge ranks among the first in the history of the State.

(5.) *When was it written?* The question of date presents the most difficulty, but by a process of elimination it has become possible to decide on the month and year in which it was written, and the occasion for it. A busy, active man like Traugott Bagge would not sit down and cover forty pages with close German script, running forty-two lines to the page, simply for amusement, and he did not live to an age when too abundant leisure would be an incentive thereto. The latest date in the "Fragment" is contained in the reference to the Assembly of 1783, already mentioned. This Assembly met in the Spring, so the paper could not have been written before April, 1783. In the Diary of 1783, the first pertinent entry is on April 19th, when the Congregation is rejoiced to hear of the signing of peace preliminaries on January 20th at Paris. On July 4th, in response to a proclamation by the Governor of North Carolina, Salem had a great Peace Jubilee. The program is given in full, (see Clewell's History of Wachovia, p. 170), but no mention is made of historical papers. Under date of October 8th, the secretary of the Aeltesten Conferenz (the ruling board of Wachovia at that time) makes this entry: "The memoranda concerning the protection of God during the American War, which have been collected by Br. Peter, will be gone through at a special Conference meeting." On November 23d, the Congregation heard of the signing of the Peace Treaty on September 3d; and on December 11th, in common with the Moravian Congregations in Pennsylvania, and by order of Congress, they celebrated a "Friedens Dankfest" by special prayer in the evening service. On December 30th, the Aeltesten Conferenz fixed

the program for New Year's Eve; "The children shall have their closing meeting at three o'clock; the adult Congregation shall have a Lovefeast at eight in the evening, at ten o'clock the Memorabilia for this year and for the War shall be read, and the closing meeting shall follow at half past eleven." This is confirmed by the Diary for December 31st, which says of the ten-o'clock service that they "remembered the many mercies which the Lord had showed them not only during the year, but throughout the eight years' War." It will be noted that Bagge's name does not appear, and the War Memorabilia, under title of "Lob und Dankopfer," read in the service and filed with the Diary, is in the handwriting of John Frederick Peter, then minister in Salem. But Peter did not come to Wachovia until 1780, would therefore have had no knowledge of events prior to that time, and it seems evident that when he began to collect the memoranda which he presented to the Aeltesten Conferenz early in October, he turned to Bagge, who at his request wrote the "Fragment" under discussion. This explains why Bagge ended his account with December, 1779, for from then on Peter knew all the circumstances as well as he, and the closing then is otherwise inexplicable, for he stops just short of the time when Wachovia came directly in contact with the opposing forces, and passed the most perilous and most exciting days of her history. The paper was far too long to read in a one-hour service, but the "Lob und Dankopfer" is strikingly like a résumé of Bagge's sketch, and the supposition that it is such is strengthened by the fact that in the Archives of Bethlehem, Pa., there are two copies of the "Lob und Dankopfer," one of which, evidently the rough copy, is in Peter's handwriting, while additional notes pasted on the margin, and slipped loose between the leaves, are in Bagge's handwriting. The other, incorporating many of these notes, is entirely in Peter's handwriting. That Bagge, having helped Peter prepare his paper, should later, without any apparent reason, take the trouble to amplify the sketch to the limits of the "Fragment," seems most improb-

able,—that he should in September have compiled his sketch, and then later assisted Peter to make a proper resumé of it, is quite natural, and fully in accord with the prevailing interest in the close of the war.

Traugott Bagge died in April, 1800, but a close scrutiny of the Diary from January, 1784, on fails to give a single reason for the writing of such a paper. The Salem Congregation had a service every evening in the week, and steadily observed anniversaries of various kinds, but Fourth of July and Third of September pass year after year, with record of the topic of the service, and no reference whatever to Declaration of Independence, or signing of Peace Treaty, or events of the war.

Summing up the evidence, therefore, it may be definitely stated that the "Fragment" containing the Mecklenburg reference belongs to the Salem "Beilage," and was written in Salem, by Traugott Bagge, about September, 1783.

ADELAIDE L. FRIES.

Winston-Salem, North Carolina,
April, 1906.

COMMENTS.

"If the controversy over the Mecklenburg 'Declaration of Independence' is ever settled, it will have to be done by genuine contemporary documents."

A. S. SALLEY, JR.,

Secretary of the Historical Commission of South Carolina.

The American Historical Review,

April, 1906, page 553.

"I have been much interested in the revival of the discussion concerning the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and particularly gratified that through your researches among the Archives of Wachovia you have found records which substantiate the claims made for this important event.

"I am thoroughly familiar with the records, particularly of the Colonial and Revolutionary periods, of the Moravians in America, and esteem them, local and general, of the highest historical value."

JOHN W. JORDAN,

Librarian Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Letter of January 21, 1907.

"The discovery of the 'Bagge Manuscript' effectually sets at rest the question of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, except perhaps in the minds of those who are unwilling to consider the matter in a fair and unbiased light.

"The Wachovia Archives are a series of records made contemporaneous with the events themselves, and form an unbroken history of the leading events of our section, and of the principal events of the State, and even of the country at large, from 1753 to the present day. In no case has the reliability of these archives ever been brought into question."

JOHN H. CLEWELL,

Archivist of Wachovia.

The Academy, Jan., 1907.

"I think you have worked out very carefully this piece of evidence; and I congratulate you on your fair and truly scientific spirit of research."

J. S. BASSETT,

Trinity College, Durham, N. C.

Letter of May 8, 1906.

"I wish to express my enthusiastic appreciation of the extremely interesting piece of historical criticism that you have written. It is certainly most clear and convincing and seems to me to be the final word with regard to the document under examination."

"Mr. Salley agrees with me that your conclusions are beyond criticism."

WALDO G. LELAND,

Department of Historical Research,

Carnegie Institution of Washington, D. C.

Letters of May 9 and July 9, 1906.

"Here seems to be a sound chain of reasoning to establish the authenticity, authorship and date of the [Bagge] pamphlet. Once admitting that it was written in 1783, or thereabouts, it must be conceded that the friends of the Mecklenburg Declaration have recovered a striking piece of evidence in support of their case. * * * Historians can no longer afford to treat the problem with the superstition of incredulity. They have now to deal, not with nebulous theories nor with hypotheses sustained by little more than the enthusiasm of local pride and patriotism; but with concrete data which must be accepted or explained away."

H. ADDINGTON BRUCE.

North American Review, July, 1906, p. 60.

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